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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis and Administration

October 17, 2007

Allyson Brooks, Ph.D.
State Historic Preservation Officer
Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 48343
Olympia, WA 98504-8343

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 34936, Northern Columbia Basin
Railroad Project in Moses Lake, Washington; Determination of Area
of Potential Effect

Dear Dr. Brooks:

As you know, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Surface Transportation Board (STB or Board) are serving as co-lead agencies for the environmental review of a proposed rail construction project called the Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project (Project). The project is located in the Moses Lake area of Grant County, Washington. The purpose of the project is to promote economic development in the region through the attraction of new rail-dependent businesses, thereby encouraging the long-term, continued use, growth, and preservation of rail operations in the region.

The Board's approval of the proposed project is considered an undertaking under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f (NHPA), and is thus covered under its provisions. The purpose of this letter is to: 1) provide additional information regarding the proposed project and 2) elicit comments from your office with regard to a determination of the Area of Potential Effect (APE) for the proposed project. (See Figure 1).

Location Information and Project Description

The proposed project includes the construction of two new rail line segments and the rehabilitation of an existing rail line segment. (See Figures 2a – 2c). Segment 1 consists of the construction of a new rail line from the area known as Wheeler to the area known as Parker Horn. Segment 1 also includes the crossing of Parker Horn, just northeast of the existing SR 17 crossing. (See Figure 2a). Segment 2 proposes to extend the existing Columbia Basin Railroad track to the industrial areas just east and northeast of the Grant County International Airport. (See Figure 2c). Segment 3 proposes to improve the existing Northern Columbia Basin Railroad track between the area known as Parker Horn and the Grant County International Airport. (See Figure 2b). A more detailed description of the proposed rail line construction and rehabilitation is attached for your review. The proposed project is expected to increase rail traffic by one train (with approximately 10-15 cars) per week, and this traffic could potentially increase over time.

Project grading and staging area activities will occur within the proposed project rights-of-way (ROW), with the exception of one proposed excavation area located at Rail Post (RP) 4 on Segment 1. This proposed excavation area will enlarge the ROW to 120 feet. All proposed grading and staging areas are included in the proposed APE boundary established for this study.

The proposed rail project is located in Sections 19 and 20 of Township 19 North, Range 29 East, Sections 3, 4, 10-14, and 24 of Township 19 North, Range 28 East, and Sections 15, 21, 22, 27, 33 and 34 of Township 20 North, Range 28 East, Willamette Meridian, Grant County, Washington. (See Figure 1). Project alignment maps of the proposal are attached to this document.

Area of Potential Effect

For archaeological resources and Traditional Cultural Properties, a proposed APE that encompasses the horizontal and vertical extent of the proposed undertaking is suggested. For historic buildings and/or structures, we suggest an APE that extends 50 feet from the centerline (both sides of the rail corridor) or to the distance of proposed horizontal excavation of the proposed undertaking. This 100-foot buffer takes into consideration the possibility of noise and vibration issues with regard to historic buildings and/or structures.

Tribal Government-to-Government Consultation

With regard to Native American tribal consultation, the Board and WSDOT initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, Wanapum Tribe, Colville Confederated Tribes, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation in February 2007. At the time of this letter, we had not received any response from the tribes. However, we are continuing to send the tribes information about the proposed project.

We would appreciate your comments on the suggested APE for this project. The Board contact for this project is Christa Dean, Attorney and Project Manager, at (202) 245-0299 or christa.dean@stb.dot.gov. The WSDOT contact for this project is Elizabeth Phinney, Rail Environmental Manager, at (360)705-7902 or phinnee@wsdot.wa.gov. We look forward to working with your office to ensure our compliance with the Section 106 process. Please do not hesitate to us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victoria Rutson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Victoria" and last name "Rutson" clearly distinguishable.

Victoria Rutson
Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis

Attachments: Figure 1. Project Vicinity Map
Figure 2a, 2b and 2c. Project Location and Area of Potential Effects Map
Description of the Proposed Rail Line Construction and Rehabilitation

cc: Elizabeth Phinney, WSDOT Rail

Description of the Proposed Rail Line Construction and Rehabilitation Project in Moses Lake, Washington

Segment 1

Beginning with the eastern end, Segment 1 would connect to an existing industrial track that currently serves a customer at the old sugar processing plant. This track is connected to the Columbia Basin Railroad's main line within the station of Wheeler. The proposed rail line would tie onto the industrial track where it diverges to the south and from there generally would head west. The track would swing slightly south and run parallel and about 620 feet south of Wheeler Road (Road 3NE). Segment 1 would proceed west through agricultural land to cross Road L NE at a signalized grade crossing. Segment 1 would then swing to the northwest and cross an above-grade irrigation canal and Wheeler Road. The proposed rail line would continue northwest into agricultural land. Segment 1 would then turn north and then west again to cross Road K at-grade, at a signalized crossing, just south of Road 4 NE. The proposed line would then sweep to the south and then again to the west to come parallel and just north of State Route 17. Segment 1 would cross Parker Horn on a combination fill and bridge structure (similar in configuration to SR17) and then would swing slightly more to the north to connect with the south east end of Segment 3. An alternate crossing for Parker Horn is also being considered. This alternative would cross Parker Horn further to the north, parallel to Road 4 NE.

The majority of land that Segment 1 would traverse is zoned for industrial use; however, much of the land is currently being used for agricultural purposes.

Segment 2

The proposed new track in Segment 2 would run from the north end of Segment 3 (existing Columbia Basin Railroad track) to the northeast in order to provide railroad access to the east side of the Grant County International Airport.

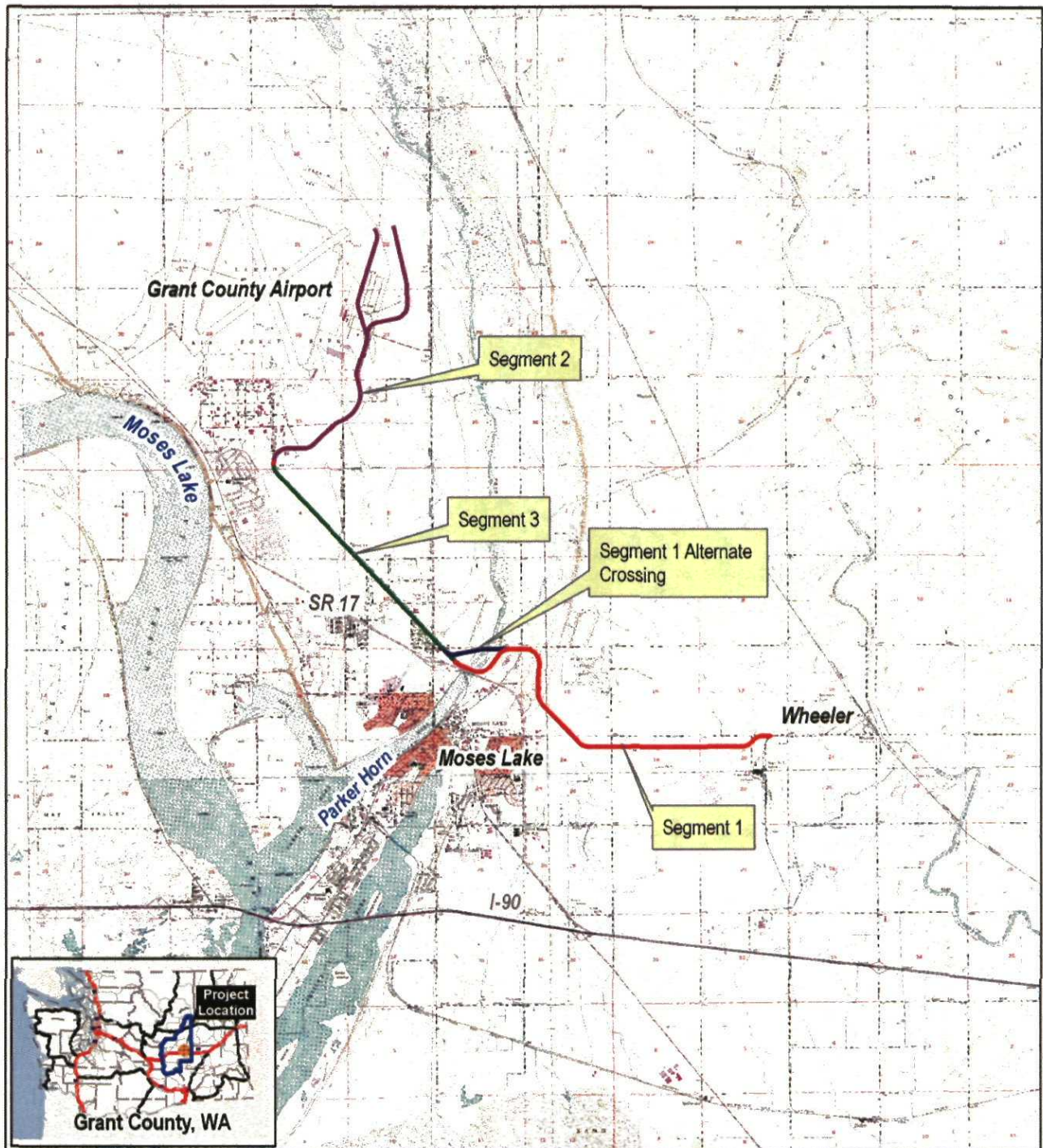
Segment 2 would begin at a turnout installed in the north end of Segment 3. The proposed line would turn and cross Forbes Road and then would proceed initially due east. The proposed line would swing to the northeast and then cross Randolph Road about 3,700 feet east of the intersection of Randolph Road and 22nd Street. Segment 2 would generally follow Randolph Road as it swings to the north around the east side of the airport. Just south of Tyndall Road, Segment 2 would head northwest and diverge away from Randolph Road to run west of Moses Lake Industries. At that point, Segment 2 would generally run north and slightly east, parallel to Randolph Road before terminating about 6,000 feet from the Tyndall Road crossing.

Another option for Segment 2 is also being considered. The alternative for Segment 2 would re-cross Randolph Road about seven hundred feet north of the intersection of Randolph Road and Tyndall Road. After crossing Randolph Road, the alternative would curve to the north for approximately 7,000 feet before terminating.

This segment has at least five or six at-grade crossings, depending on the route chosen, and would traverse primarily land zoned for heavy industrial use.

Segment 3

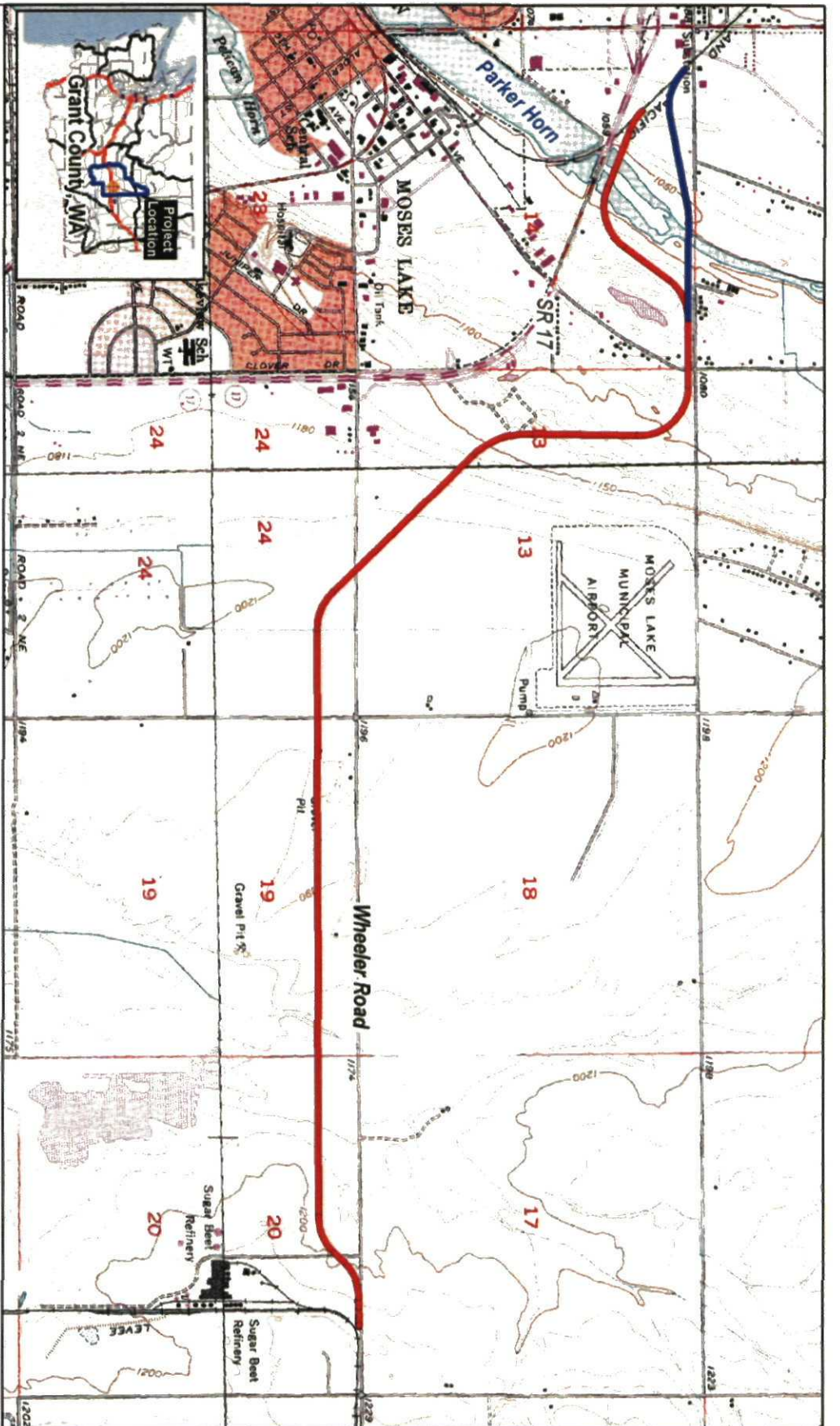
Segment 3 consists of approximately four miles of existing track (not including numerous industrial spurs at the Grant County International Airport) that was originally built by the military to access Larson Air Force Base (now Grant County International Airport). The track connected at Moses Lake to the then Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (Milwaukee Road). The line segment north of Parker Horn has five private grade crossings, and 11 public crossings, two of which are signalized. There are no bridge structures besides one small irrigation canal structure. The proposed rehabilitation of this segment consists primarily of rail, tie, and other track material replacement. The rail line upgrade would permit use of larger 286,000-pound rail cars. These size cars are becoming standard on the main line rail system. Upgrades to the two signalized grade crossings (Stratford Road and Loring Road) are also included in the design, although they are in good to excellent condition. With these upgrades this portion of the railroad could be operated at 25 miles per hour (mph). The existing alignment and general profile would not be changed.



Sources: USGS Moses Lake North, Wheeler, Moses Lake South and Sieler Quadrangles (1956)

Legend

- Segment 1
- Segment 1 Alternate Crossing
- Segment 2
- Segment 3 - Existing Columbia Basin Railroad



Legend

- Segment 1
- Segment 1 Alternate Crossing

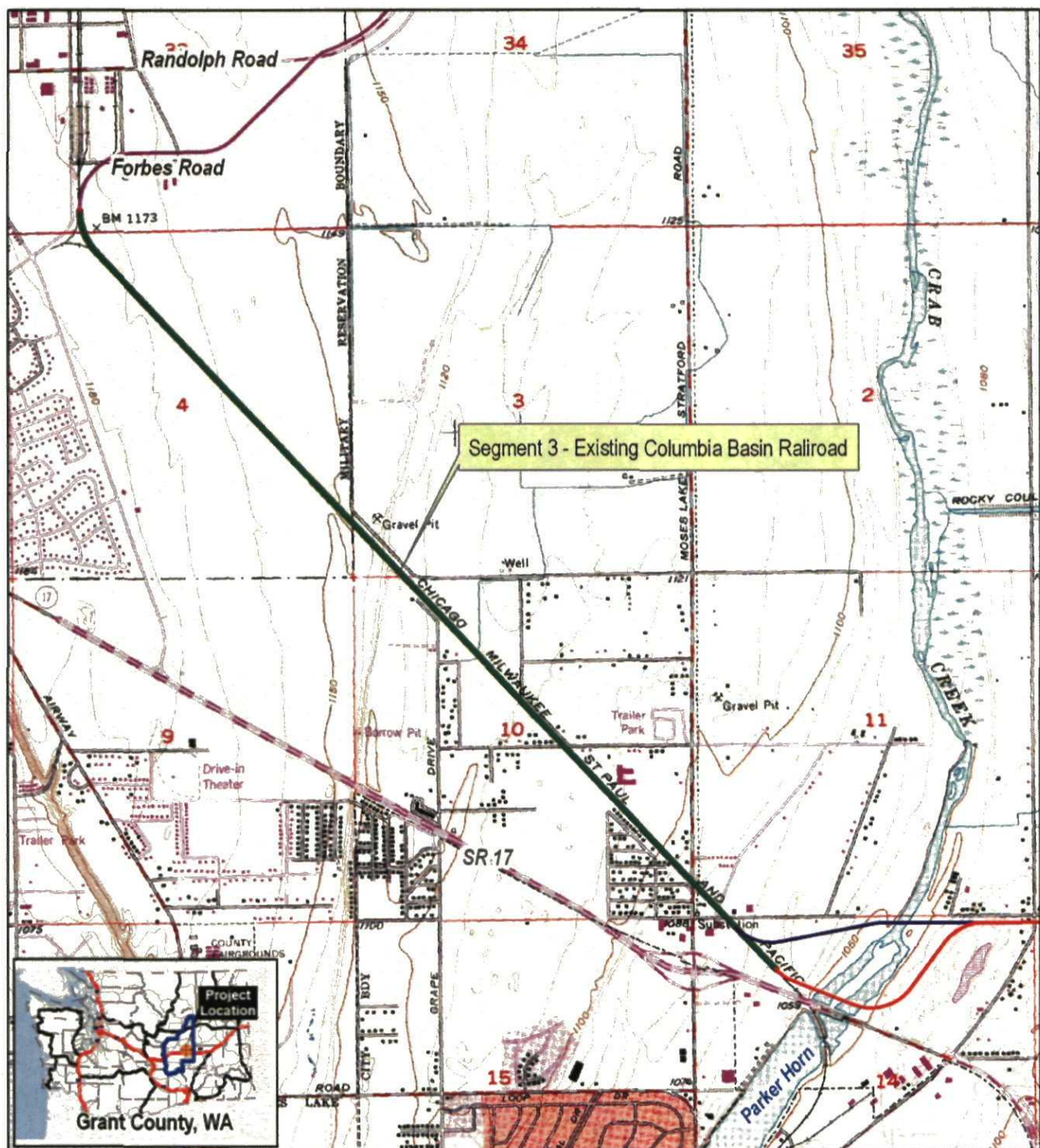


Sources: USGS Moses Lake North, Wheeler Quadrangles (1956)



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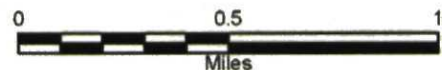
Figure 2a. Area of Potential Effect (APE) Map
Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project
Segment 1 and Segment 1 Alternate Crossing
August 2007



Sources: USGS Moses Lake North Quadrangle (1956)

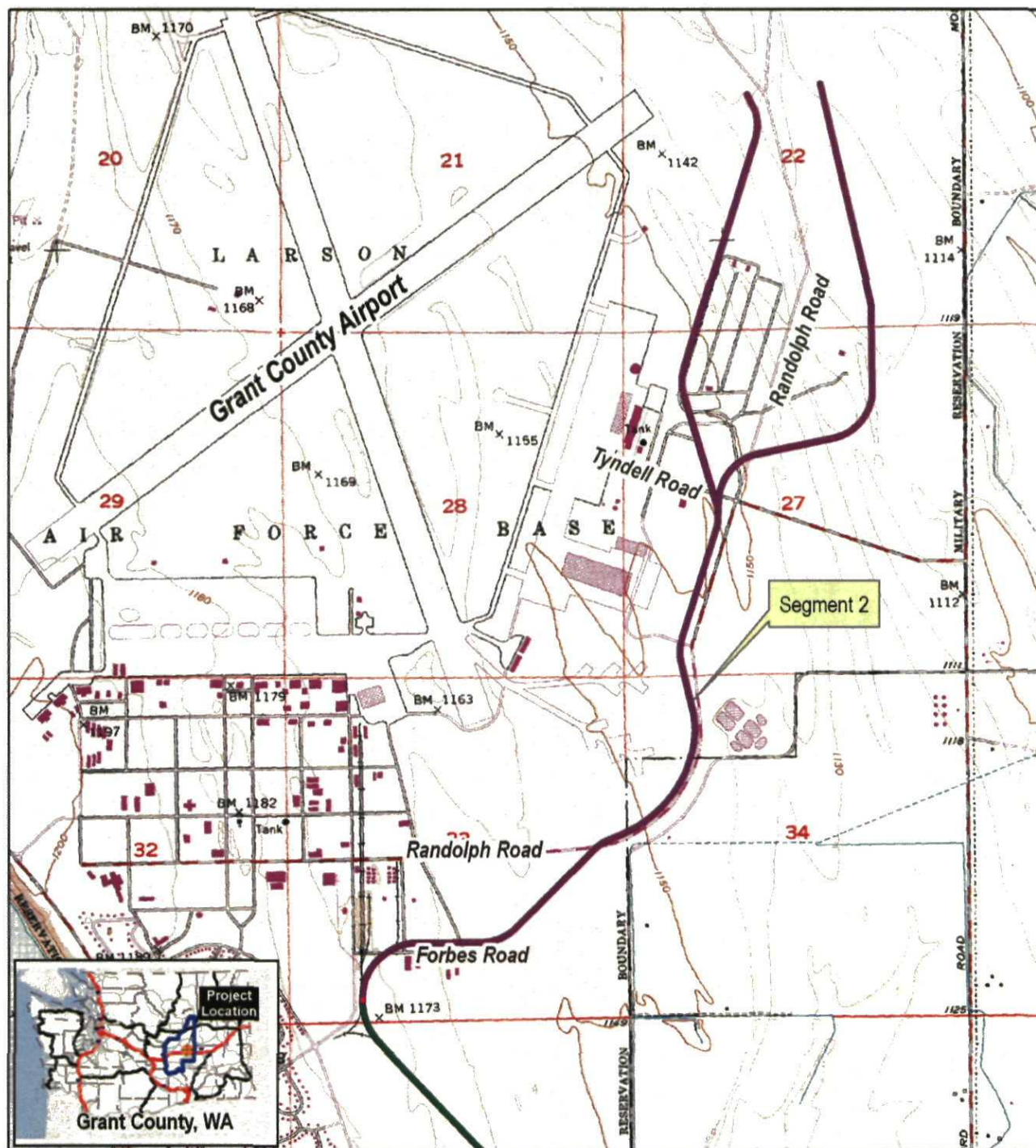
Legend

- Segment 1
- Segment 1 Alternate Crossing
- Segment 2
- Segment 3 - Existing Columbia Basin Railroad



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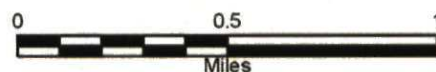
Figure 2b. Area of Potential Effect (APE) Map
Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project
Segment 3 - Existing Columbia Basin Railroad
August 2007



Sources: USGS Moses Lake North Quadrangle (1956)

Legend

- Segment 2
- Segment 3 - Existing Columbia Basin Railroad



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Figure 2c. Area of Potential Effect (APE) Map
Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project
Segment 2
August 2007